Reincarnation

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Christian . . .

Doctrine . . .

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Christian Doctrine

All of us, no doubt, are familiar with what is called the conflict between religion and science, but perhaps disposed to regard it as something peculiar to modern, or comparatively modern, times, and brought about by the rapid progress in physical science. There has, however, always been something akin to this conflict in all ages and in the days of ancient Greece, when the mythology taught in the temples occupied the position that orthodox Christianity does with us in the West to-day, philosophers were at pains to show that the mythical stories, when properly understood, might be reconciled with science as taught in those times.

It may indeed be regarded as inevitable that such a conflict should take place, for a certain body of teaching is put into allegorical language and in course of time the real significance of the allegories is forgotten; or the masses are put in possession of the text of the allegories and are prone to place their own interpretations upon them. Consequently, when anyone more advanced than his fellows is born into the world, and re-discovers the forgotten meanings, or perceives the incongruities of prevailing interpretations and seeks to set mankind on the right track again, a conflict between ignorant and learned ensues, and the well-meaning seer is fortunate if he escapes with nothing worse than vulgar abuse, for the masses are slow to understand and slow to receive.

It is an ill-wind that blows nobody good, and in this conflict there is a distinct gain for humanity; for it brings about a very active enquiry into all phases of knowledge, and the masses are faced with problems to solve which otherwise they would have paid no attention to. They are called upon to exercise their

judgment upon a choice between two opposite ideas, and however feeble or erring that judgment may be, they have been given an intellectual exercise which it would have been impossible to induce them to undertake without a conflict. This conflict, thus, may be regarded in some lights as not only inevitable but necessary, whereby is secured a perpetual need for explanation and understanding, a perpetual reviewing of facts, summing-up and reaching conclusions.

In the above manner arose what we know as Christian apologetics. There is first of all the dogmatic statements of doctrines, and then follows the explanation known as apologetics, which seeks to show the reasonableness of the dogmas in the light of science, of philosophy and what is known through other religious sources. Thus during the development of apologetics the same intellectual exercise is forced upon mankind.

Unfortunately for Christendom, Rome got control of the Christian Church and refused to allow any interpretations of dogmas, or any dogmas, which were contrary to her way of understanding. This intolerant attitude stifled independence of thought, and prevented the necessary exercise of judgment, and however much some may say that control by Rome was an inevitable consequence of happenings in those days, or necessary to bring about peace within the Church's organisation, it stunted the intellectual growth of Europe for hundreds of years, and the peace bought at the price was the peace of mental sluggishness.

However, in course of time sections of the Church freed themselves from the intolerant dominion of Rome and established independent organisations. But though they freed themselves from the intolerance of Rome, intolerance in a large measure prevailed within their own dominions, and still prevailed at that time when Darwin enunciated his theory of evolution. This theory of evolution, which promised to explain so much, and unlock so many of the secrets of nature, was not viewed with a friendly eye by Christian theologians but bitterly opposed. It was not received in the light of an advancement of knowledge, and a new point of view which would help us to see into and understand the laws of God's universe, but was regarded as an open enemy, which threatened the existence of preconceived ideas, and treated as such.

Now I am bound to say that if the doctrine of reincarnation in any shape or form had been a part of Christian doctrine the conflict between religion and science which followed the statement

of Darwin's theory would have been avoided, or at least, robbed of its bitterness; for the doctrine of reincarnation is the explanation of the soul's development, and the doctrine of evolution is the explanation of the body's development; and soul and body are ever associated in this process of development, and the two doctrines are complementary and are to be studied in conjunction with advantage to both.

In justification of the statement that a conflict would have been avoided had reincarnation been a part of Christian doctrine, we may cite the case of Hinduism, which offered no objections to Darwin's theory, and in conversation with a learned Hindu the writer took occasion to question him upon this point, whether or not Hindus had opposed it, and his reply was brief but to the point, "Certainly not," he said; "it is too evident. Moreover, it is supplementary to the doctrine of transmigration taught by Hindus." We have also a corroboration from the side of the scientists, for Huxley, the great controversial stalwart for the theory of evolution, stated in his Romanes lecture of 1893: "None but very hasty thinkers will reject it on the ground of inherent absurdity. Like the doctrine of evolution itself, that of transmigration has its roots in the world of reality."

Now I have to say that the doctrine of reincarnation was at one time a part of Christian doctrine; that it was an accepted doctrine with the Jews; that there are indications of it to be found in the Old and New Testaments and the Epistles, and that it was taught by the Church Fathers.

To return to the controversy referred to, it will be remembered that the issue brought out two different explanations of the creation of this world. On the one hand was Darwin's theory of evolution, which implied that the world and all that therein is came into existence by a gradual process involving long periods of time, and as age after age slipped by so the Earth gradually took shape, vegetable and animal life appeared, and finally the world process culminated in the evolution of man. It was a slow process.

On the other hand were the theologians, who opposed this theory of creation and hugging many preconceived ideas about the account of creation contained in the first chapter of Genesis, thought they saw in this process of gradual development that which would deprive creation of Divine agency. Further than this, taking the "days" of the Genesis account to mean days of twenty-four hours' duration, and working on Archbishop Ussher's computa-

tion that creation took place 4004 B.C, they contended for the view that on each of the successive "days" of creation as God willed so in the same moment there came into existence that portion of creation that He willed. This view of creation differed entirely from that of the evolutionists in that it was a precipitate creation, so momentary as to be deprived of anything we could call a process. These two views, then—development and precipitancy—supplied the material for the greatest of conflicts between religion and science, and yet I know not why "precipitancy" was so stoutly upheld by theologians, for there is nothing in the Genesis account of creation to indicate that it took place first in the year 4004 B.C., and second that it was precipitate. The first verse of Genesis says that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and this might have occurred millions of years prior to the day of Adam; nor does it say precipitately, it might have come about gradually, but for the fact that we had this literal rendering of the word "day" as meaning a period of twenty-four hours' duration. Yet again this view is untenable, for our day of twenty-four hours is regulated by the Earth turning on its axis and its parts being alternately turned to and turned from the light of the sun, and it is not until after the third "day" that the sun is created and the day of twenty-four hours regulated in this way rendered possible. In short, our Scriptures are Eastern Scriptures and possess Eastern characteristics of figurative language, and there is nothing to prevent us placing an interpretation upon these "days" which may be drawn from the 90th Psalm, where it says, "A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night;" or from the 3rd Chapter, II. Peter, where we read, "But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Or we may go further afield and in India to this day what is called a "day" of the Creator is quite a settled matter, and is stated to be the immense period of 4,320,000,000 years. Now if we compute the period of creation's "days" on that basis we have a lapse of time sufficient to satisfy the wildest calculations of geologists or astronomers.

However, setting this aside and placing the Creation at 4004 B.C., we have a sufficiently long period of time for all practical purposes, and should we (granted that God still works in His universe) be justified in reaching the conclusion that the method of God in dealing with mankind during that period has been one of

precipitancy, or is He not well-described as "patient and long-suffering"? Our Christianity teaches us that he sent his only begotten Son to redeem the world. When that Son was rejected was a sudden and precipitate vengeance visited upon mankind. Again, it is 1911 years since Christ came. Did He expect that mankind would suddenly turn from its wickedness and receive Him with open arms? He knew well enough that He would have to speak to deaf ears and appeal to hard hearts, yet He lived His life well knowing that His work was to be for the ages to come.

We may carry this observation to our own case, for we are told that if we seek to bring about a change in our character from bad to good, and if we pray for God's help we shall receive it. Now God's assistance is infinite, surely, as a fraction of infinity is still infinity, but is there any indication of precipitancy in that assistance? Which of us, indeed, who has laboured earnestly to remove some blemish of character, has not found that patient labour and persistence of effort, for years perhaps, is necessary to achieve any measure of success, and there is nothing in the way that that success reaches us to suggest that God's ways of assistance are the ways of precipitancy.

There is no need to labour the point further, and what has already been said was necessary only to get a certain clearness of the issue, that of development versus precipitancy, for there is perhaps not a work on theology published in these days which does not prepare the way for the recognition of the theory of evolution, or which fails to point out that there is nothing incompatible with it and the Genesis account of creation. But though theologians are prepared to accept the theory of evolution as the process of mundane or cosmical creation, when it comes to the consideration of the creation of the human soul we are met with the old difficulty of precipitancy versus development. The theory of reincarnation accounts for the creation of the soul by a long process of development, during which it takes shape and acquires qualities in varying degrees which go to account for the different phases of development that we see in our fellow-men. In Christian doctrine the doctrine of the soul's creation is quite unsettled. There is first the doctrine of creationism, which holds that God creates each soul by a special act as each child is born into the world. Then there is the doctrine of Traducianism, which asserts that the soul of a child is derived from the soul of the mother in the same day that the body is derived. But in the Anglican persuasion it is proper to say that

a blending of these two doctrines of Creationism and Traducianism is probably nearer the truth. Then we have a fourth statement that a combination of the three doctrines of pre-existence, creationism and traducianism is an acceptable alternative. So we contemplate the medley of the Christian Church, with the Romanist a creationist, the Lutheran a traducianist and the Anglican a traducian-creationist. Nothing, however, is really settled in regard to these alternative doctrines except that pre-existentism was condemned by a Church Council, but even now in Protestant Churches a pre-existentist may raise his voice without much risk, provided he is traducian-creationist also.

Before proceeding to deal with the evidence for the contention that reincarnation was an accepted Christian doctrine, it is necessary to say that all doctrines of the pre-existence of the soul or successive incarnations of the soul are included under the meaning of the term reincarnation for the purpose of this essay, whether they be doctrines of simple pre-existence, or of transmigration or reincarnation, and it is not intended to show that the doctrine as elaborated in works upon Theosophy was taught in early Christianity. In point of fact, and in face of the tendency on the part of modern theologians to receive the doctrine of evolution as accounting for the creation of the world, it may be argued that all doctrines of the pre-existence of the soul involve the doctrine of reincarnation. For if the creation of the souls of men was coincident with mundane creation and by a process of development the assumption is that that development was in contact and by contact with the visible universe. And if not, where is the need to wrench the souls of men from their natural setting to satisfy theological zeal?

The first authority to notice is Philo Judaeus who would be over 50 years of age at the time Christ taught in Palestine. Philo was well-versed in Jewish Scriptures and Platonism, and attempted to reconcile the two. He was not alone in seeing this agreement between Greek philosophy and Judaism, for St. Clement wrote, "The doctrines there taught contained in them the end of all instructions as they were taken from Moses and the prophets." Involved in this agreement was the Platonic doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul, which Philo readily embraced. Philo was no doubt aware of the doctrine as set forth in the Thorah, but nevertheless supports it by quoting from the "Wisdom of Solomon" ix.-15: "I was a boy of good disposition, and obtained a good soul;

nay, rather, being good, I came into an unpolluted body." (Drummond's rendering.)

We can only briefly touch upon each of these authorities and must move on to Josephus. There are several references in Josephus works which evidence the fact that the doctrine of pre-existence in the form of transmigration was believed by the Jews, but we give a portion of his speech (quoted in the Universal Text Book of Religion and Morals) given to the Jewish soldiers when they saw that further resistance to the besieging Romans was useless, and had decided upon the course of killing each other to escape capture: "Do ye not remember that all pure Spirits who are in conformity with the Divine dispensation, live on in the loveliest of heavenly places, and in course of time they are again sent down to inhabit sinless bodies; but the souls of those who have committed self-destruction are doomed to a region in the darkness of the underworld?" Now we are to remember that Josephus was not addressing a select body of philosophers who might be expected to be familiar with obscure and little known doctrines, but was speaking to a company of soldiers and expected them to be familiar with this doctrine of transmigration; moreover, he treats it as a doctrine sufficiently known and accepted to be employed as a real force to dissuade them from the rashness of self-destruction.

The following is a passage from the Thorah quoted by E. D. Walker in his work on Reincarnation: "All the souls are subject to the trials of transmigration; and men do not know which are the ways of the Most High in their regard. They do not know how many transformations and mysterious trials they must undergo; how many Souls and Spirits come to this world without returning to the palace of the Divine King. The Souls must re-enter the absolute substance whence they have emerged. But to accomplish this end they must develop all the perfections, the germ of which is planted in them; and if they have not fulfilled this condition during one life, they must commence another, a third, and so forth, until they have acquired the condition which fits them for re-union with God." There is nothing in this passage at variance with the doctrine of re-incarnation as developed in Theosophical literature.

We come next to consider passages in the Scriptures and the first is that which we noted as being brought into requisition by Philo, namely Wisdom of Solomon IX., 15. "For I was a witty child, and had a good spirit. Yea, rather, being good, I come

into a body undefiled." Drummond in his Philo Judaeus Vol. I., p.p. 200-201, remarks in regard to this passage: "It is implied by the statement before us, that souls prior to their entrance upon their earthly life, might be divided into good and bad, and that the qualities of the bodies which they obtained was dependent on their moral condition. . . . This passage has, indeed, received interpretations which relieved it from the burden of what seemed to Christian commentators an obnoxious doctrine, but these interpretations are, for the most part, influenced by dogmatic requirements and offer violence to the plain meaning of the words. Coming into the body can refer only to the time when the union of body and soul took place; and if entering an undefiled body is the result of personal goodness, that goodness must have been manifested in a previous state of existence. This clear statement is introduced as a correction of the more ambiguous clause immediately preceding."

We need not waste time adding to the words of Drummond, but will consider another passage which occurs earlier on in the book of the "Wisdom of Solomon," II., Ch. i.—v.: "For the ungodly said, reasoning with themselves, but not aright, Our life is short and tedious, and in the death of a man there is no remedy: neither was there any man known to have returned from the grave." The passage proceeds developing the same idea until we reach v. 5, which reads: "For our time is a very shadow which passeth away; and after our end there is no returning: for it is fast sealed, so that no man cometh again." Now, if this is what the ungodly say "but not aright," then the converse is true that men *were* known to have returned from the grave, and that after our end here there *is* a returning, and it is *not* fast sealed so that no man cometh again.

This passage is useful because it gives us the term employed in the Scriptures which is equivalent to our term of re-incarnation, namely, "returning." Instead of speaking of a soul re-incarnating they spoke of it as returning. The use of this term gains another point in the consideration of our subject, for the pre-existence or re-incarnation cannot be said to be one passed in another sphere of existence in other planets or systems, or to take place elsewhere than on this earth, for "returning" implies coming back to a situation formerly occupied.

Bearing in mind this meaning of the word "returned," we shall have a light thrown on the book of Ecclesiastes which, in my

opinion, is nothing more than an account of successive incarnations of the soul of the Preacher. His account of himself begins in the 12th verse of the 1st chapter, where he says, "I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem." He was king; he does say that he was deposed or that he abdicated, and with his silence on this point, and in the light of what follows, we must conclude that it referred to a former incarnation. Thereafter this account of himself is punctuated by the remark, "Then I returned," and a study of the sections of the book of Ecclesiastes between any of these statements of "then I returned" will show that the Preacher possessed different characteristics in each case. Moreover, the order of these separate characters revealed in successive incarnations is progressive, beginning with the pleasure lover who denies himself nothing, but is constantly rocking between indulgence and remorse. So he returned, and this time his outlook upon the world is distinctly pessimistic. "Behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive." Happily the Preacher's account of himself is here brief, but as if borne down to the grave with this oppressive thought upon him, he determines when next he incarnates to help the oppressed. Then he returned, and he is now the friend of man, teaching that "two are better than one" for mutual assistance. In these days he might be the organizer of the labouring classes, urging combination against capitalism, and threatening retribution for such as oppressed the poor. Then he has intellectual difficulties. After all we don't know that there is a hereafter, and the best in the circumstances is a serviceable, worldly wisdom. Lastly he returns, and this time his outlook and philosophy is serener. He is the man who unravels the texture of human nature, who is not deluded by the glamour of worldly place and power, but his keen perception discerns that, in so far as this world is concerned, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, not yet riches to men of understanding." And he has seen "servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth." But there is a law of compensation, and "he that diggeth a pit shall fall into it." And then looking back upon all his experience in past incarnations he sums up and determines the conclusion of the whole matter, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

Now if the explanation given of this phrase, "then I returned" be not the correct one, we may ask what other meaning can be obtained from it. It cannot refer to returning from some place, for there is no suggestion from beginning to end that the Preacher journeyed anywhere, or returned. It cannot refer to turning from wickedness, for why so often repeated, nor is there any reason to suppose that the views recorded in, say, the pessimistic section, were looked upon as wickedness by the Preacher from which a turning was necessary. The words stand so peculiarly alone, and all things considered there seems no reason to suppose that the meaning differs from that which may be drawn from the "returning" contained in chapter 2 of the "Wisdom of Solomon."

There is a somewhat obscurer reference to re-incarnation contained in Job xxxiii., v. 22. It says, "Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness. Then he is gracious unto him, and saith deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's; he shall return to the days of his youth(s) . . . . He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit." This may be taken to be a reference to the "bottomless pit" with which a Scotch divine, who preached that there was no Hell, was taunted. His reply was logical enough. "If it is a pit it must have a bottom; and if it is bottomless it cannot be a pit." This reading of the passage, however, is not clear when we realise that man's soul is already in the pit, and "all these things worketh God oftentimes to bring back his soul from the pit"; but looked at in the light of re-incarnation it is immediately rendered as: oftentimes a man must incarnate in the flesh until he learns that sin profiteth not, and his evolution frees him from the necessity of re-birth.

The next passage for consideration is contained in the 90th Psalm, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten." This is a passage in common use, but do we consider what the significance is of the plural in the first word "years"? It implies that we pass through more than one period of seventy years, which is the period of an incarnation in the flesh, and in the great cycle of re-births this seventy years is but as one year in comparison.

Our next passage is that from Malachi iv., 5. "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," and how anything in the nature of a doctrine of re-incarnation and pre-existence can meet with rejection at the hands of Christian theologians in the face of this prophecy in Malachi, passes comprehension. The whole Jewish nation was on the alert in expectation of prophets of earlier times reappearing in their midst, and this is a distinct promise that the prophet Elijah would again incarnate before the coming of the great and awful day of the Lord. Theosophists may be accused of fancifulness in seeing evidence for the prevalence of this belief in early Christian times, but there is something to be said about the density of those who oppose this proposition, for not only have we the statement in the New Testament that this prophecy was fulfilled, but the statement is made by Christ himself. In Matthew xvi., we read that Jesus "asked his disciples saying, whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias! and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets." There are no two meanings to this passage, and it could only be by an unnatural twist of the words which would regard it as meaning anything else than that men (the Jews) looked upon Christ as the return or re-incarnation of the personalities mentioned. If this was a false doctrine, here was the opportunity afforded Christ to say so. He might have said that it was ridiculous, and cautioned his disciples not to be led astray by belief in such a doctrine, but he does not, and he himself sanctions the doctrine when in chapter xvii., "His disciples asked him saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come and restore all things. But I say unto you that Elias has already come and they knew him not. . . Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." Could anything be plainer? The Jews, in expectation of the fulfilment of the prophecy in Malachi, were looking for the return of Elias, and it is Christ who says John the Baptist is the re-incarnation that was looked for.

Nor is this the only occasion that was afforded Jesus of contradicting an "obnoxious doctrine," for in John ix. we read, "As Jesus passed by he saw a man which was blind from his birth, and his disciples asked him saying, Who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" But to be born blind as a punish-

ment presumes a former responsible existence in which to merit punishment or reward, and Jesus might have been excused a little impatience if he here turned and said, "I am constantly being met with this 'abomination' (to employ an orthodox term), and wish to contradict it emphatically." But all he does is to explain the individual case, and again gives his sanction to the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls.

To go earlier on, in John iii. we remember that Nicodemus came to Christ by night, and Christ said to him, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Then Nicodemus asks how these things may be, and we have Christ's surprise at his ignorance in the words, "Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things? Here was Nicodemus, a ruler and teacher of his people, to whom the doctrine of transmigration was, or ought to be, familiar, asking how a man could possibly be born again into the flesh, and Christ rebukes him for his feigned ignorance. It may be held that this second birth referred to a spiritual birth, and was not a reference to transmigration. That may likely be, and Christ himself draws the distinction. "If I have told you of earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" which implies that He had been teaching the doctrine of transmigration, of re-birth into the flesh, an earthly matter, which might be reasoned upon and judged from the standpoint of this world, and from that standpoint easy of comprehension, for it explained so much in the world, yet they believed not; how, then, were they to be expected to believe if He told them of a spiritual re-birth, a heavenly thing, not of this world, but the exact opposite, and in fact the abnegation of all that is worldly.

Without receiving the doctrine of re-incarnation, how shall we explain Christ's reply to the Sadducees who denied the resurrection, and instanced the case of a woman who had married seven husbands, and asked whose wife she would be accounted at the resurrection. Christ's reply appears to be a sweeping condemnation of all who marry, which gives no hope of the resurrection except to bachelors and spinsters. "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more." A study of early Christian practice will reveal how closely this was followed, which has left its mark in the celibacy of monks to-day. St. Paul did not disallow marriage, but would rather that others were as he. What meaning can this have, then? Replied

to from the point of view adopted, the soul in its pilgrimage of re-birth, in its search for perfection, finds as it nears that perfection that the call of humanity is greater than the call of home comforts, that there is demanded of the greater souls greater sacrifices; and lastly, in the supremest act of self-sacrifice, the whole life is laid at the foot of the cross without one single worldly tie, and then does it "attain to the resurrection," when it ceases or frees itself from the necessity of re-birth, and it is said of it that it dies no more. The last enemy death being slain, it looks before and after, and entering and departing from a body is performed in full consciousness, therefore it may not be said that it dies.

We now leave the gospels, and come to St. Paul, the last court of appeal in the development of Christian doctrine, and find in II. Corinthians, ii., 15-16, "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." Bearing in mind what has been mentioned that the quickened soul which has laboured and attained unto the resurrection, or which is saved, that no break occurs in consciousness at the moment called death, or that remembrance of former existence is not completely lost when incarnation in the flesh takes place, then such a soul leaving the greater glory of the heaven world to re-incarnate will look upon this life as a death, and an imprisonment of its faculties in flesh. To these then the Christian brethren were a sweet savour of "death unto death," but to those whose consciousness of existence is confined to the activity in the flesh, a coming incarnation would be regarded as another life, and to those they are "the savour of life unto life."

Again referring to St. Paul, we may ask if the soul has had no existence prior to our birth upon earth, how could he write, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." There is something then in ourselves, which existed before the foundation of the world which could be chosen to "be holy and without blame," and what that something is, is no part of this discussion, so long as we establish that "something" pre-existed birth upon earth.

The passage just quoted is made use of by Origen, and his scheme is one that implies that former "lives" were probably passed in other spheres, and that other "lives" will be lived in other worlds to be created. However that may differ from our present

conceptions, it is clear that pre-existence of souls is taught, for Jacob is said to have been "worthily beloved by God, according to the deserts of his previous life," and throughout his scheme the idea of merit for former actions rules the station in life, etc., into which we are born. "Every man received a body according to his deserts and his former actions." Rational creatures indeed have existed from eternity, according to the following passage from De Principiis. "I am, indeed, of opinion that, as the end and consummation of the saints will be in those ages which are not seen and are eternal, we must conclude (as frequently pointed out in the preceding pages) from a contemplation of that very end, that rational creatures had also a similar beginning. And if they had a beginning such as the end for which they hope, they existed undoubtedly from the very beginning in those ages which are not seen, and are eternal."

Such then was Origen's doctrine of the soul's creation, and his influence on the early church was universal. His doctrine, too, was the only statement upon the subject, and remained in force until its condemnation by the second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553, and we may ask on what authority was it condemned, and in what manner was it contrary to Scripture However, the condemnation of Origen's doctrine left a gap in Christian doctrine which had to be filled, and thence arose the two statements of Creationism and Traducianism which did battle with each other. And in regard to these two doctrines we may ask what is it commends them to us for acceptance in preference to Pre-existentism; in what way are they more directly in touch with the inspiration of the Apostolic age; and what claims have they upon Scriptural authority. In all of these directions they lack supporting arguments, and in their entire development have not a single passage in Scripture to support them, and indeed nothing but the brute force with which Rome created the orthodox position in those early times.

We have thus seen that the doctrine of re-incarnation in one form or another was an accepted doctrine by the Jews under the Old Dispensation, that it had Christ's sanction and more than a simple sanction in the New Dispensation, that it is supported by numerous passages from the older Scriptures, from the Gospels, and from St. Paul's epistles; that it was developed by Origen; that it was the earliest and only Christian doctrine until its condemnation in 553 A.D., when it was supplanted by the two doctrines referred to.

However that may be, the orthodox position is still quite unsettled, and we may say that, without exception, the present doctrine of the soul's creation is the weakest part of the whole Christian system, both intrinsically and scripturally. It is not supported by a single passage from the Scriptures, old or new, and is upheld by the most trifling sophistries; further, in the development of the alternative doctrines it is necessary to ignore all the passages from Scripture quoted above, which support an entirely different doctrine of the soul's creation.

What then prevents us from re-introducing the doctrine of re-incarnation to the Christian system? It would seem as if the orthodox system were kept purposely weak by Divine guidance to permit of this re-introduction, when the time should come for such a step. And when we consider all the points in favour of such a step, that this doctrine of re-incarnation has the claim of antiquity, that it would strengthen a position hitherto weak, that it would require so little re-arrangement of the present doctrines to affect the change, that it would be in conformity with the gospel story, that it would explain apparent injustices in the ways of God to man, and give us a sound basis on which to deal with the social problems with which we are faced, we cannot but regret that its adoption is delayed. And finally it brings with it the consoling thought that all souls will be saved eventually, that none are to perish everlastingly, but though through a long series of incarnations, perhaps, they toil painfully towards perfection, and at last return once more to God whence they came.